

PLANS Writing Strategy

Type of Writing Supported:

Informational & Expository

Grade Level: **Grades 4-9**

Upper Elementary to High School

Stage of Writing Supported:

Planning and Drafting

PURPOSE:

What does this strategy help students do?

The PLANS strategy offers a structured approach that helps students activate their thinking, organize ideas with the FRAME graphic organizer, prioritize content, draft clear paragraphs, and refine writing for clarity and correctness.

Why is this strategy effective?

The PLANS strategy fosters metacognition, improves organization through visual scaffolds, builds confidence with repeatable routines, and strengthens revision skills through targeted error-checking.

P

Preview

What do I know about this topic?

Who is my audience and what do I want them to learn or feel?

L

List

What are my key points and supporting details?

How can I organize them visually?

A

Assign

What order makes the most sense for my reader?

N

Note

How can I turn my plan into full paragraphs?

S

Search

Does my writing make sense?

Is it free of errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation?

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

How to Introduce:

- Teach the PLANS strategy with the lesson, slides, and modeled think-alouds.
- Practice using the Frame organizer and explain each step's purpose.

Scaffolding:

- Use sentence starters and paragraph frames to support structure.
- Fade scaffolds as students gain independence.
- Hold brief, targeted conferences to guide stuck writers.
- Track needs with a conference log.
- Offer speech-to-text tools for idea generation and drafting.
- Pair dictation with FRAME organizer and teach revision.

Practice Ideas:

- Group students for Preview, List, and Assign to support idea sharing.
- Have students complete the Note step alone to build confidence.
- Use peer review during Search to strengthen revision skills.

DO'S

- ✓ Teach each PLANS step with modeling and think-alouds.
- ✓ Check understanding by having students explain each step.
- ✓ Use visuals like anchor charts and FRAME organizer.
- ✓ Provide repeated practice and support and celebrate progress.

DON'TS

- ✗ Don't skip steps.
- ✗ Don't expect mastery after one lesson.
- ✗ Don't force on structure.
- ✗ Don't treat PLANS as one-size-fits-all.

PLANS Strategy: Tips for Implementation

How to introduce the strategy

- Explicitly teach the PLANS writing strategy with the lesson plan and slide deck/presentation provided
- Use modeled writing with think-alouds
- Practice the strategy with the PLANS Frame graphic organizer
- Discuss the purpose of each step explicitly

Scaffolding for different learners

Provide sentence starters or paragraph frames if necessary

- **Purpose:** Some students—especially multilingual learners, students with disabilities, or reluctant writers—may know what they want to say but struggle to structure their sentences.
- **How to Implement:**
 - Offer sentence starters for introductions, transitions, and conclusions (e.g., “One way camels survive in the desert is...”, “Another important adaptation is...”, “These features show that...”).
 - Provide paragraph frames that model the structure of a body paragraph:
 - Topic Sentence: “Camels have humps that store fat.”
 - Supporting Detail 1: “This helps them...”
 - Supporting Detail 2: “In addition...”
 - Closing Sentence: “This is one reason camels can survive in harsh desert conditions.”
- Gradually fade scaffolds as students demonstrate independence.

Use teacher conferencing during any of the steps that the student is struggling with. Complete regular check-ins for understanding.

- **Purpose:** Conferences allow for individualized feedback and targeted support at the exact step where a student is getting stuck.
- **How to Implement:**
 - Conduct brief, targeted conferences (3–5 minutes) during independent or small group work time.
 - Use specific prompts related to the PLANS step the student is working on:
 - Preview: “What do you want your audience to know after reading?”
 - List: “What’s your main idea? Can you give me two supporting details?”
 - Assign: “Which idea should go first to make your writing flow smoothly?”
 - Note: “Can you turn that bullet point into a full sentence?”
 - Search: “Read this aloud—does it sound right?”
 - Keep a conference log to track which steps need repeated reteaching for individual students.

PLANS Strategy: Tips for Implementation

Allow students to use speech-to-text tools

- Purpose: Speech-to-text removes handwriting or keyboarding barriers and allows students to focus on idea generation and organization.
- How to Implement:
 - Encourage students to speak their sentences aloud during the Note step, using tools like Google Docs voice typing, Read&Write, or built-in device dictation.
 - Use speech-to-text for students who struggle with transcription but can verbally generate rich content.
 - Teach students to review and revise dictated text during the Search step, as these tools may misinterpret words or punctuation.
 - Pair speech-to-text with the FRAME organizer so students have their ideas visually organized before dictating.

Ideas for group practice

Pairing or grouping students (2–3 per group) for the Preview, List, and Assign steps of PLANS encourages collaborative brainstorming, content discussion, and shared organization of ideas. Students can benefit from multiple perspectives and peer support when gathering information and deciding on structure.

However, the Note step should be completed independently. Writing individually ensures that:

- Autonomy is developed: Students take ownership of translating shared plans into their own sentences, word choices, and organizational flow.
- Skill mastery is assessed individually: Independent drafting provides a clear measure of each student's ability to apply PLANS to create a complete draft without relying on others' phrasing.
- Writing voice is preserved: Independent writing allows for individual tone, style, and vocabulary to emerge—even when the content outline is similar across group members.
- Confidence and self-reliance grow: By completing the Note step alone, students strengthen their belief that they can write independently, a key goal of the strategy.

Once drafts are complete, Search can return to a collaborative format through structured peer review (e.g., exchanging drafts within the group for targeted feedback). This supports revision skills while maintaining the integrity of individual writing.

PLANS Strategy: Do's and Don'ts

DO'S

- ✓ **Model Each PLANS Step Clearly**
 - Teach Preview, List, Assign, Note, and Search explicitly.
 - Use think-alouds to show your thought process during each phase.
- ✓ **Check for Understanding Frequently**
 - After each step, ask students to explain or show their work.
 - Example: "Show me your numbered ideas after Assign."
- ✓ **Use Visuals and Scaffolds**
 - Display the PLANS anchor chart for reference.
 - Provide FRAME graphic organizers and step-by-step handouts.
- ✓ **Provide Repeated Practice**
 - Use buddy editing so students can practice giving feedback with the checklist.
- ✓ **Celebrate Small Wins**
 - Acknowledge progress at each step.
 - Reinforce that writing success builds over time.

DON'TS

- ✗ **Don't Skip Early Steps**
 - Preview, List, and Assign build essential structure before drafting.
 - Jumping ahead weakens idea development and organization.
- ✗ **Don't Expect Instant Mastery**
 - Students need repeated, guided practice to internalize PLANS.
 - Independence comes with time and support.
- ✗ **Don't Force One Structure**
 - Let students organize ideas in ways that make sense to them.
 - Flexibility in Assign supports diverse thinking.
- ✗ **Don't Use PLANS as One-Size-Fits-All**
 - Adapt the strategy for different tasks, topics, and learners.
 - Customize supports to meet varied student needs.

Publication Details

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What is the Writing Classroom?

The Writing Classroom was developed to help educators apply effective, evidence-based writing interventions. Originating at the University of Kansas with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, this initiative supports instructional strategies for all students, especially those who struggle with writing.

What is AI SCORE?

AI-SCORE enhances writing competency for students with learning disabilities by:

- Integrating evidence-based instructional strategies
- Providing immediate AI-generated feedback
- Personalizing the writing process to improve outcomes

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Learn More

 WritingClassroom.org

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